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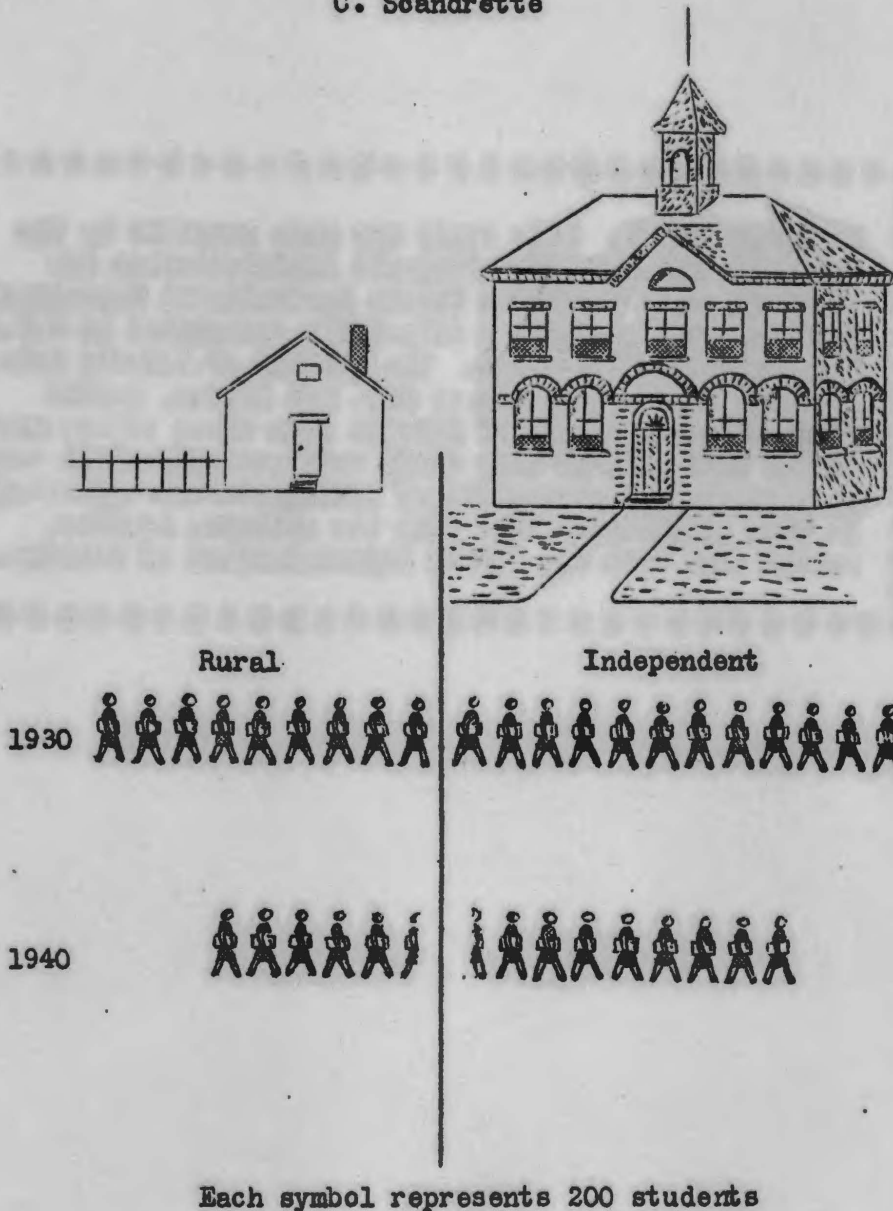
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October, 1940

THE DECLINING ENROLLMENT PROBLEM
in
the Elementary Schools
of
Beadle County

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*

For a number of years population experts have predicted that the falling birth rate would eventually result in declining elementary enrollments.* For Beadle county this prophecy began to be fulfilled in 1929. Between 1930 and 1940 elementary enrollment in Beadle county declined almost 35 percent. Migration from Beadle county during the drought period, however, has probably been fully as responsible for the shrinkage of elementary enrollment as the declining birth rate.

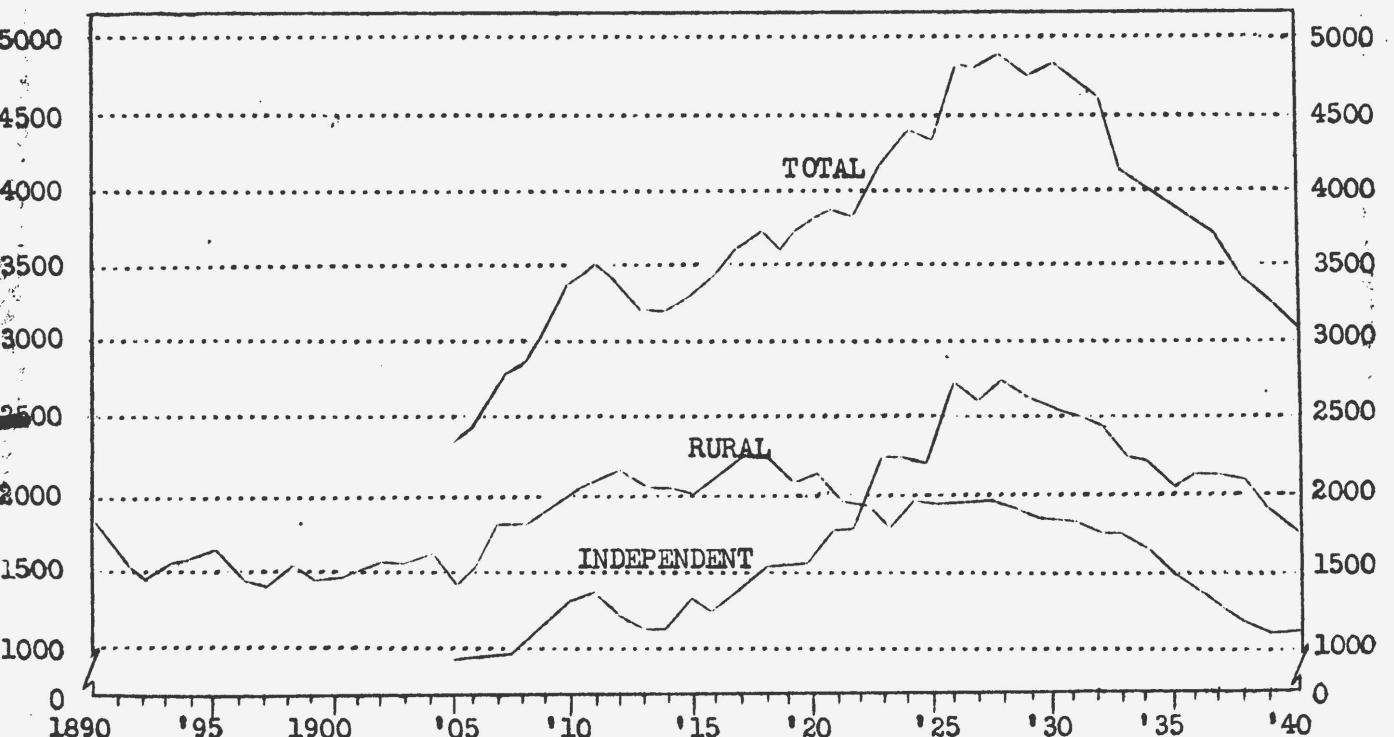
The peak year in elementary enrollment for Beadle county was in 1928 when nearly 5,000 pupils were enrolled. It will be noted that since 1923 elementary enrollment in the independent schools has exceeded rural elementary enrollment. The peak in rural enrollment was reached in 1917 when 2,220 pupils were enrolled. Although rural enrollment has been declining since 1917 the decrease in rural enrollment has been especially rapid since 1925. The peak in independent enrollment was reached in 1928, when nearly 2,759 elementary pupils were enrolled in the town schools. Although both factors are doubtless involved in each case it is probable that the lowered birth rate has been the major cause of declining elementary enrollments in Huron, whereas migration has probably played the leading role in the rural areas.**

During the 1939-40 term there were a total of 3,190 elementary pupils enrolled in Beadle county. Of this number 1,148 were enrolled in common school districts; 1,736 were enrolled in independent districts; 127 were enrolled in consolidated districts; and 179 were enrolled in parochial schools. As of June, 1940 the shrinkage in the number of rural elementary pupils had caused 28 rural schools to close. Ten other rural schools were operating with five or fewer pupils. Not only is the per pupil cost excessively high in the small rural schools but the educational benefit derived from schools where there are only five or less pupils is probably small. From a planning standpoint, therefore, the situation created by the declining elementary enrollment appears to be Problem Number One.

* Between 1920 and 1939 the number of births per 1,000 of the population in Beadle county declined over a third.

** Huron accounts for approximately three-fourths of the independent elementary enrollment of the county.

Figure 1. Elementary School Enrollment in Beadle County by Years, 1890 - 1940.*



* Prior to 1905 the enrollment of independent schools was not reported.

Source: Biennial Reports of State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Figure 2. Elementary School Enrollments in Beadle County School Districts, 1920, 1930 and 1940.

Hitchcock City									
Nance	Bonilla	92 91 47		Pleasant View		Lake Byron	Milford	Barrett	
64	--	Altonna							
47	NA	72		31		35	57	43	
32	58	56		31		55	69	58	
		28		26		37	33	28	
Whiteside	Allen	23	16	15	8	Iowa	Liberty	Foster	
45	58	14	13	7	26		77	70	
NA	58	12	9	11	11	38	67	67	
41	37	Broadland		Fairfield		40	38	41	
		--	--	21	20	28			
		10	38	15	20				
		*	28	12	8				
Wessington City									
175	Wessington	Hartland		Theresa		Valley	Cavour Twp.	Banner	
142							154	Yale City	
84	Wolsey	56		120		44	23	31	
	118	52		76		21	--	38	
60	133	26		55		30	11	16	
29	106						58		
21							40		
							59		
							71	Cavour City	
							21		
Sand Creek									
61	Vernon	Dearborn		Clyde		Huron City		Logan	
NA	71	86		64		Custer Twp.		Iroquois	
28	54	60		64				43	
	33	36		51				47	
		Virgil City						23	
Burr Oak	Kellogg								
43	56	19		66		13	18	Pearl Creek	
79	69	27		56		34	15	Belle Prairie	
30	53	22		39		11	19		
						Clifton			
						15	15		
						19	14		
						15	*		

Legend: 1st Number - 1920

2nd Number - 1930

3rd Number - 1940

* No enrollment within district

NA - Not Available

Source: Record of Beadle County Superintendent of Schools

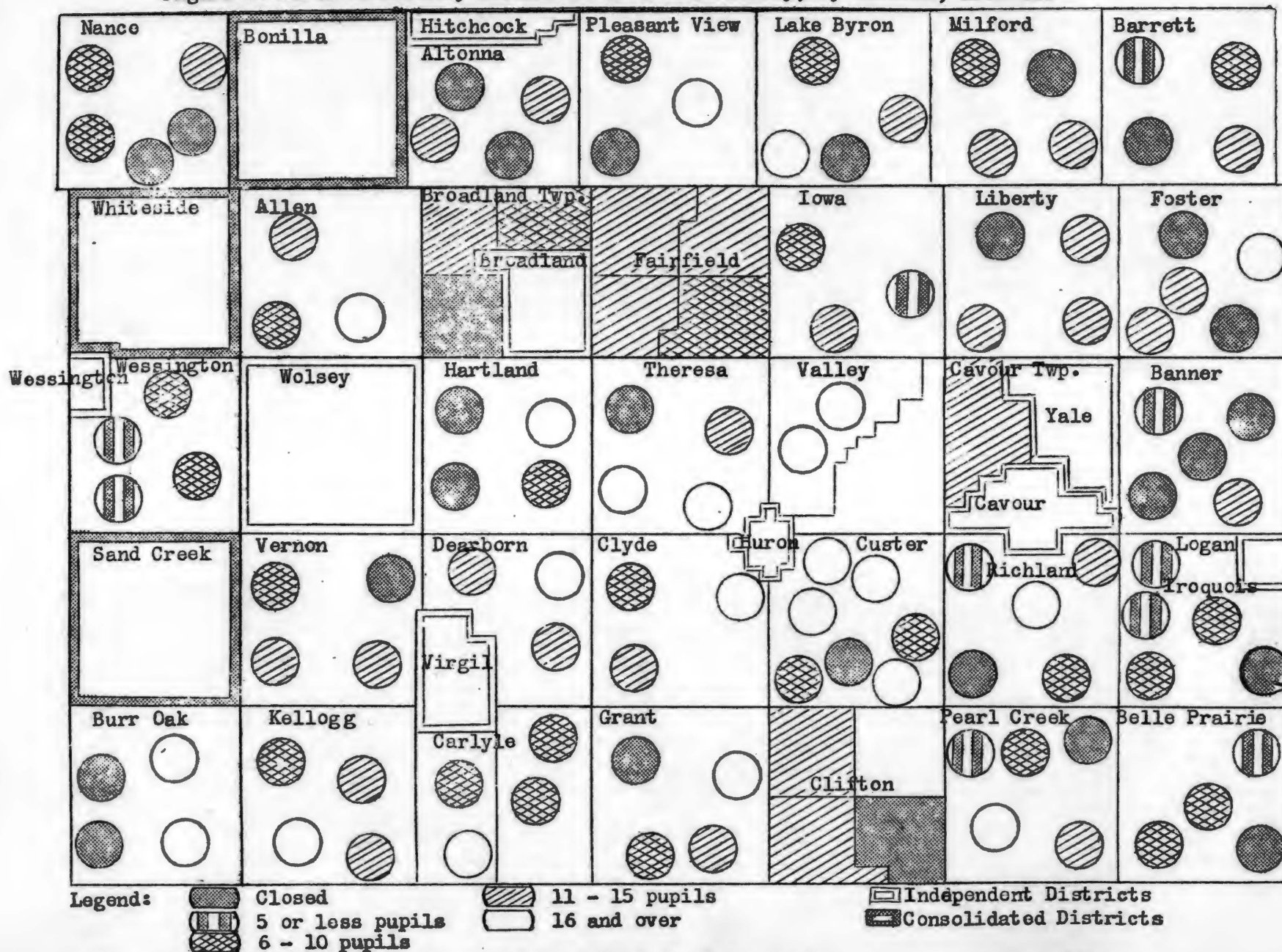
Independent Districts

Consolidated Districts

There are a total of 123 rural elementary schools in Beadle county, exclusive of the consolidated schools. Of this number, 28 schools have been abandoned due to the shrinkage in elementary enrollment. In Beadle county the prevailing type of school organization is the township district, the small district pattern being found in only four townships. Three townships have consolidated schools. Because Beadle county was settled some years later than the counties in the eastern part of the state, they adopted the township district type of school organization rather than the small district pattern*. By the time Beadle county was settled it had become evident that the central South Dakota area would not become densely enough populated to make the small district system workable. Fig. 2, shows the decline in elementary enrollment by districts, between 1920 and 1940. It will be noted that the elementary enrollment in many rural districts declined between 1920 and 1930. The greatest decline, however, occurred between 1920 and 1940. For the town schools the decline did not take place until after 1928. That the Beadle county decline in elementary enrollment is now wholly due to migration, is indicated by the shrinkage of enrollment in the city of Huron. In spite of the fact that the population of Huron declined only slightly (1.5 percent) between 1930 and 1940, its elementary enrollment declined approximately 31 percent. It will be noted that in many of the rural townships elementary enrollment declined over 50 percent between 1920 and 1940.

* In 1883 the territorial legislature provided for township district organization but did not force the small districts which were already in existence to disband. Prior to that date early settlers in the eastern counties had established the small district pattern of school organization to which they were accustomed in the more densely populated states from which they had come.

Figure 3. Rural Elementary Enrollment in Beadle County, By Schools, 1939-40.



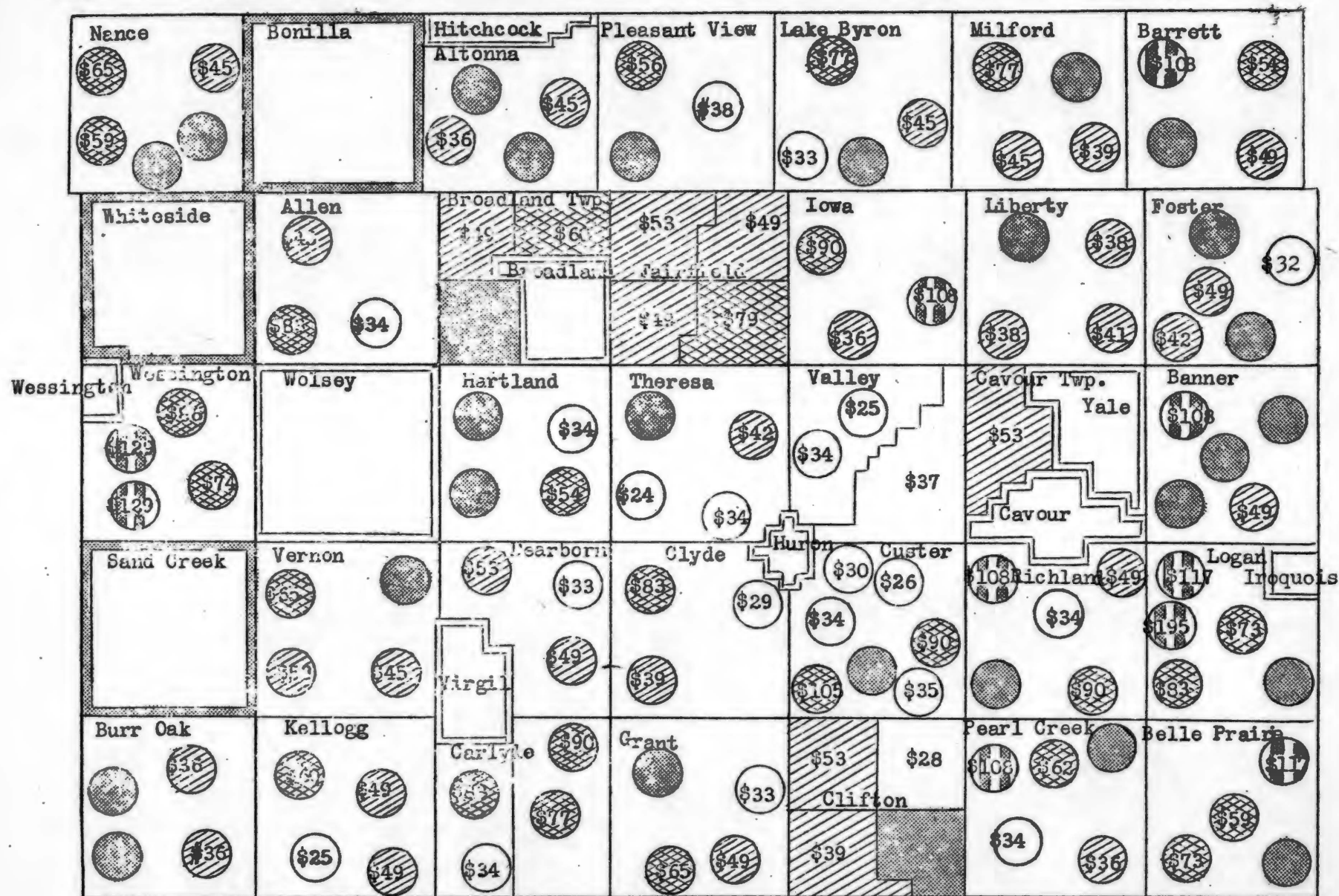
The 1939-40 enrollment of each of the common schools in Beadle county is shown in figure 3. It will be noted that 28 schools were abandoned; 10 were operating with 5 or fewer pupils; 28 had 6 to 10 pupils; 35 had 11 to 15 pupils; and 22 had over 16 pupils. During the 1939-40 term 38, or almost one-third (30.8 percent), of the common schools in Beadle county were either closed or operating with 5 or fewer pupils. Sixty-six, or over one-half (53.6 percent), were either closed or operating with 10 or fewer pupils. Almost two-thirds of the townships had 1 or more abandoned schools during the 1939-40 term.

Between 1920 and 1940 the average enrollment per school dropped from 17.4 to 9.3 pupils. The greatest decrease has occurred since 1930 as in that year there was an average enrollment of 14.8 pupils.

The proportion of pupils enrolled in the lower grades has shrunk rapidly during the past few years. In 1920 the number of students in the first three grades accounted for 45.8 percent of the total elementary enrollment whereas in 1939 it accounted for only 33 percent of the total elementary enrollment. Due to this rapidly dwindling proportion of beginning students it is probable that many more schools will be forced to close within the next few years. As has already been pointed out 10 schools are now operating with 5 or less pupils.

One of the factors which makes the small school relatively inefficient from an educational point of view is the lack of intellectual stimulation which comes through competition. It is common knowledge among teachers that where there are only one or two pupils to a grade it is usually difficult to get students interested in their studies.

Figure 4. Enrollment and Instructional Cost Per Pupil in Beadle County Rural Schools, 1939-40.



Legend: Closed 11 - 15 pupils Independent districts
 5 or less pupils 16 and over Consolidated districts
 6 - 10 pupils

Source: Records of Beadle County Superintendent of Schools.

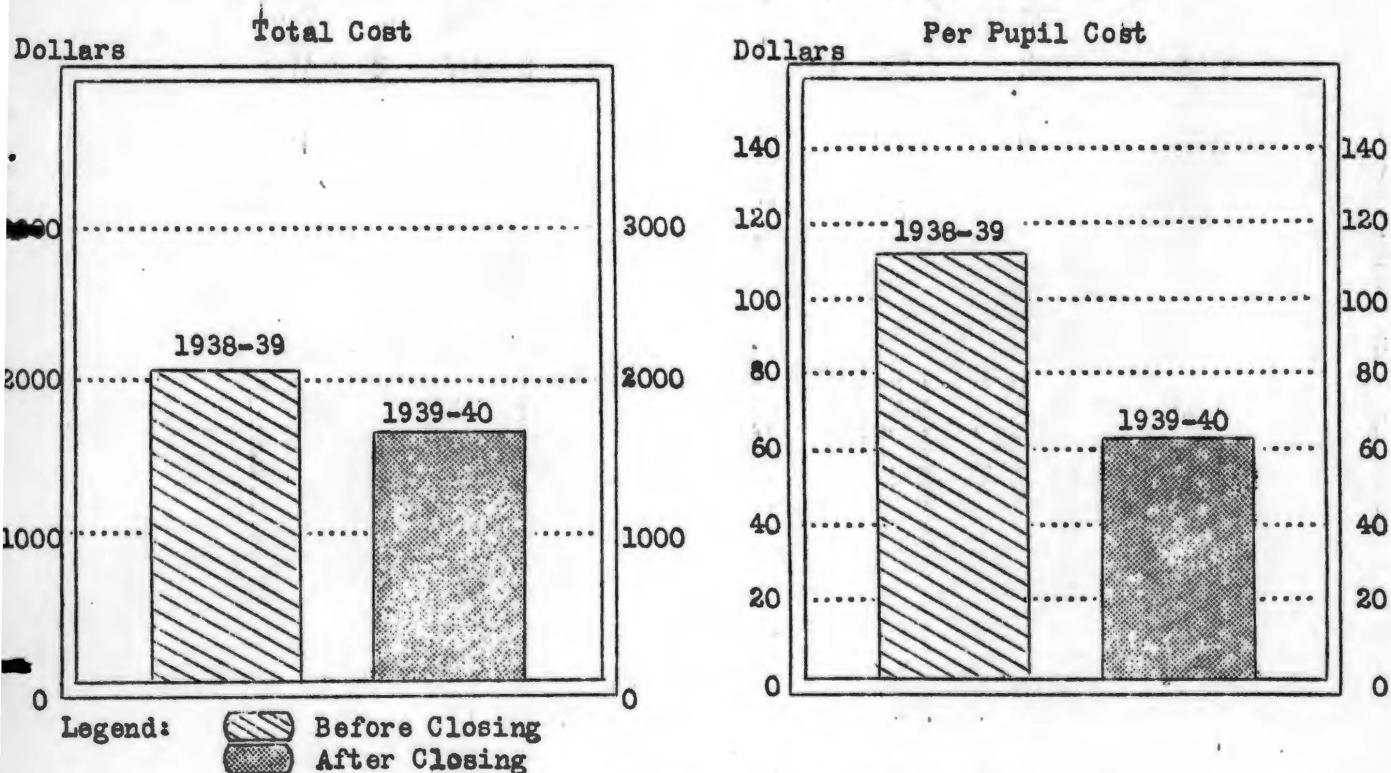
The operation of schools for less than 10 pupils, particularly for 5 pupils or less is excessively expensive on a cost per pupil basis. Since it is very difficult to determine maintenance cost for individual schools in township districts, instructional cost (teacher's salary) has been used as the basis of comparison. During the 1939-40 term per pupil instructional cost varied from \$24 in one Theresa township school of 24 pupils to \$195 in a three pupil school in Logan township.

Average Instructional Cost* Per Pupil for Operating Rural Schools of Various Sizes in Boadle County During the School Year, 1939-40.

Size of School	Number of Schools	Number of Pupils	Total Cost	Average Cost Per Pupil
Pupils				
Total	123	1148	\$54,225.00	\$47.23
Closed	28	--	--	--
5 and under	10	46	5,490.00	119.35
6 - 10	28	219	15,727.50	71.82
11 - 15	35	440	19,440.00	44.18
16 and over	22	443	13,567.50	30.62

* Instructional cost is here defined as teacher's salary and does not include text books and supplies.

Figure 5. Total and Per Pupil Cost of Elementary Education in Hartland Township Before and After Closing One School, 1938-39 and 1939-40.

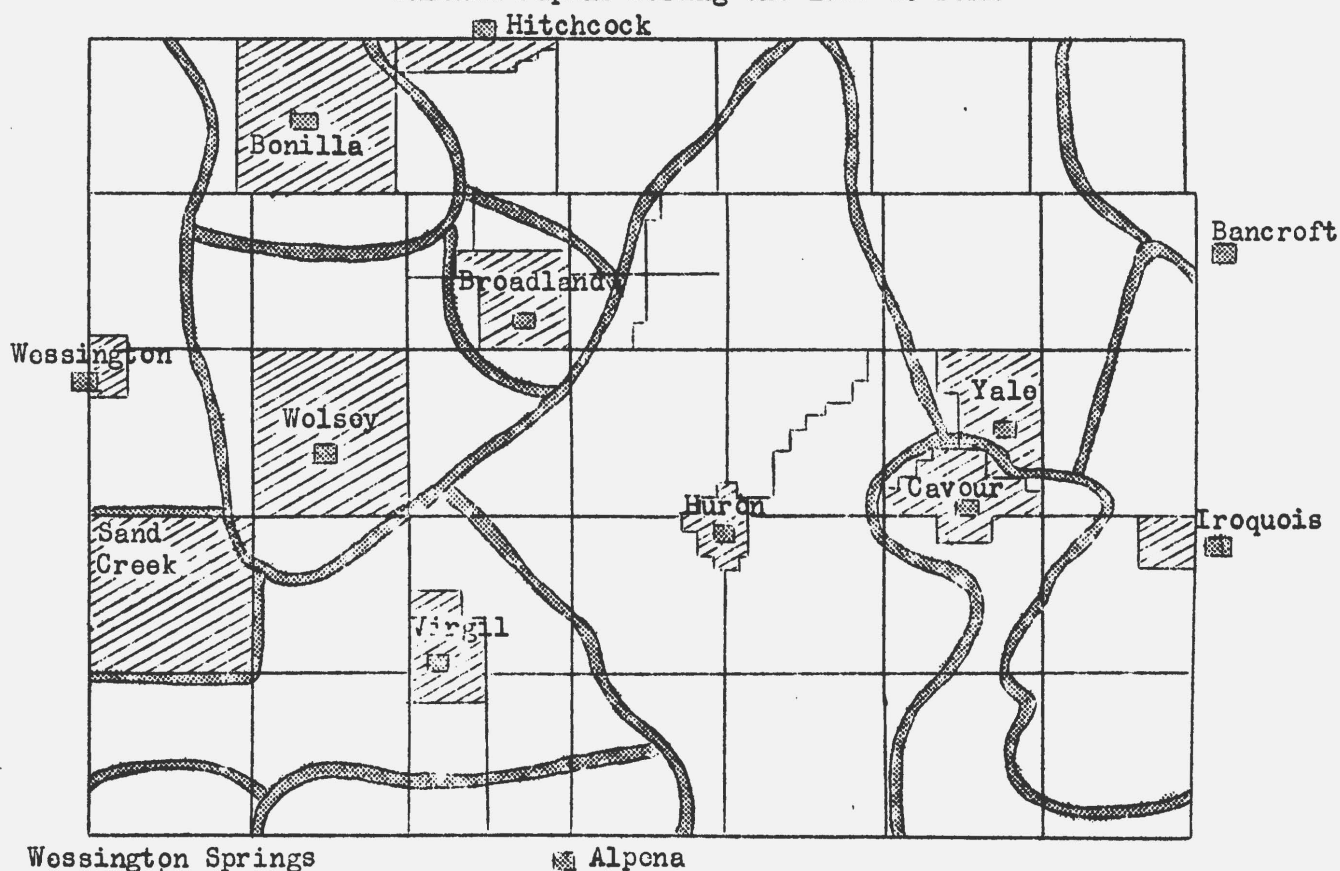


Source: Records of Beadle County Superintendent of Schools.

In township districts it is possible to keep one or more of the schools open and to close the other schools when the enrollment drops below a predetermined figure. During the 1938-39 term there were 3 schools operating in Hartland township with a total enrollment of 19. Originally there had been 4 schools in Hartland township but one school had been abandoned prior to the 1938-39 term. In spite of the fact that enrollment increased to 26 pupils in the following year (1939-40), the school board decided to close one of the remaining schools and send all pupils in the township to the two schools which were left open.

On the basis of total expenditures, exclusive of high school tuition, the Hartland township school district saved \$495.07 by closing one of its schools. During the 1938-39 term the cost of maintaining the 3 rural schools in Hartland township amounted to \$2,151.05 as compared with \$1,655.98 during the 1939-40 term. In other words, the district saved over 20 percent by closing one school. On a cost per pupil basis the expense of operating the Hartland elementary school system during the 1939-40 term amounted to only \$63.69 as compared with \$113.13 during the 1938-39 term. The increase in enrollment during the 1939-40 term accounts for the fact that the per pupil cost was lowered to a greater extent than the total expenditures.

Figure 6. Areas From Which Each High School Enrolled Most of Its Beadle County Tuition Pupils During the 1939-40 Term



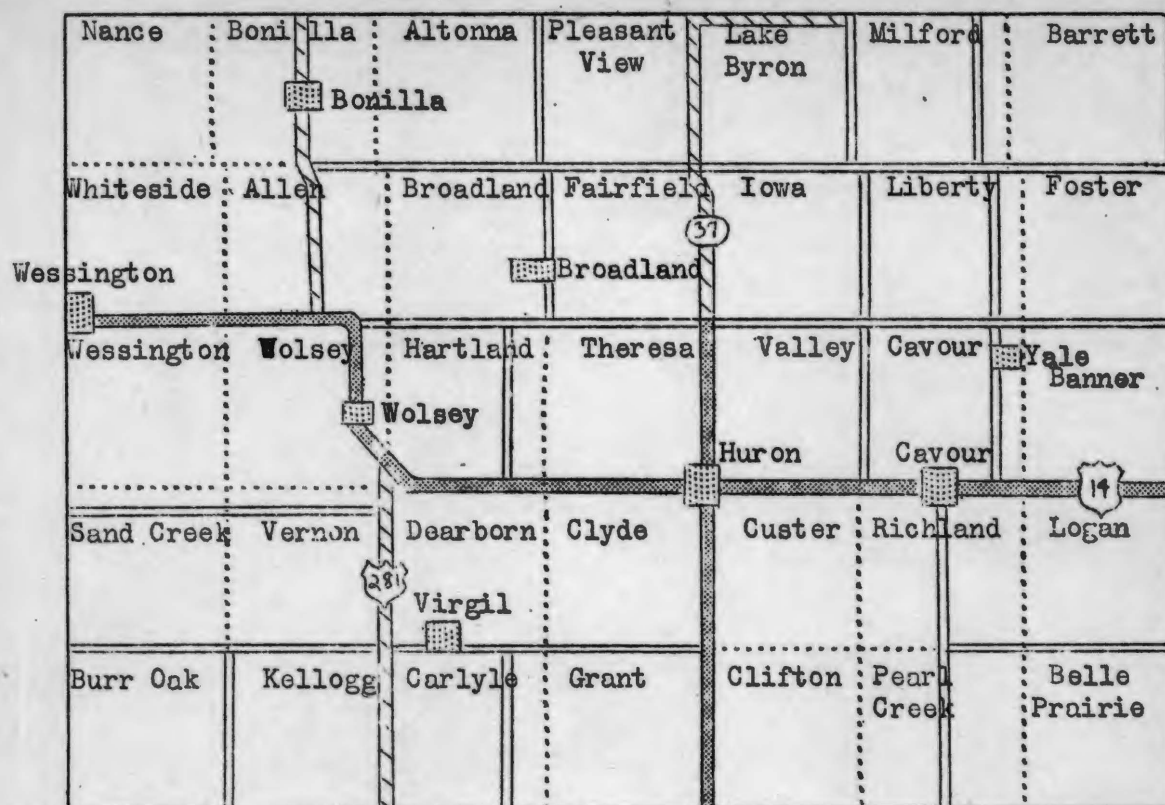
Source: Records of High School Superintendents

A glance at the above map which shows where farm children attend high school, suggests a possible ultimate solution to the problem caused by declining elementary enrollments. Since 1921 it has been compulsory for school districts which do not have high schools of their own, to pay the tuition costs of pupils residing within their borders who attend high school in nearby towns. Because the expense of operating their own high schools would be prohibitive, all of the common school districts in the county have sent their high school pupils to nearby independent districts, paying tuition costs. During the 1939-40 term over 300 Beadle county farm children attended high school in Beadle and adjoining counties.





Elementary enrollment in the common school districts has now declined to the point where the cost per pupil of operating the smaller elementary schools is also becoming prohibitive. (See Table 1, page 4) Eventually the common school districts may solve this problem in the same way in which they have already solved the high school problem. Instead of maintaining their own schools at a heavy per pupil cost, districts may close their schools and send the few remaining pupils to the town school, paying tuition and transportation charges. Since elementary enrollment is declining in the town schools as well as in the rural schools, it is probable that within the next five years the present independent district facilities will be large enough to accommodate both the town and country pupils.

The first step, however, will probably be for the township districts to maintain one school in the center of the township and close other schools within the township when the enrollment drops below a specified minimum. Pupils who remain in the area formerly served by a closed school can be sent to the centralized school, the board paying transportation as provided by law. In the case of the small districts the first step will probably be for these districts to close their schools when the enrollment drops below a predetermined figure, sending the remaining students as tuition pupils to the nearest school which is still in operation.

Figure 7. Federal, State and County Highway System in Beadle County, 1940.



Legend:

Hard surface roads  Graveled - county 
Graveled - state and federal  Earth surface - county 

Source: State Highway Commission

A glance at the above map indicates that good roads are found in every township of the county. No matter where he may live, practically every farmer in the county has good roads to his nearest trade center. In 1930, over 62 percent of the farms in Beadle county were located on improved roads. Good roads and the automobile have caused many functions of former open-country institutions to be shifted to the towns. Cases in point are the crossroads general store and the open-country church. The farmer now goes to the village center to buy groceries, clothing and other necessities; to sell his produce; to attend church; and to visit and engage in other forms of recreation. The farmer also sends his sons and daughters to the village high school.

If elementary enrollments continue to drop it is likely that before long rural districts will also be sending their few remaining elementary pupils to the town schools as tuition students.

As previously mentioned, however, the first step in adjusting to declining elementary enrollment will probably be for township district boards to keep one school open in the center of the township and to close all other schools when the enrollment drops below a predetermined figure. Pupils who remain in the area formerly served by a closed school will then be sent to the centralized school, the board paying transportation costs as provided by law. In the case of the small school districts the first step will be to close the school when the enrollment drops below a specified minimum, sending the remaining pupils as tuition pupils to the nearest school which is still in operation.

Suggestions for Solving the Elementary
School Problem

A schoolboard confronted with the problem of declining enrollments should study its local situation carefully before taking action. The four plans listed below have been tested either in South Dakota or in other states and have been found practical. The first alternative may be applied as a temporary measure until such time as further action is advisable, but the last three suggested plans call for more or less permanent reorganization of the prevailing district system.

Cooperating with nearby rural schools

Keep the present rural district intact, but close the school, or schools, when enrollment drops to five or fewer pupils. Send the remaining pupils to the nearest rural school in which satisfactory arrangements can be made, with the district paying transportation costs when the distance exceeds four miles, and tuition when the school to which the pupils are transported is located outside the home district.

Tuition pupils to town schools

Close the rural school and send the remaining pupils as tuition students to the nearest independent school. This plan besides being less expensive than maintaining several small schools, has the further advantage of giving farm children greater educational opportunities than is possible in the small one-room school. It is essentially the same method which has been successfully used in handling the high school situation.

Consolidation

Incorporate several small districts into a consolidated district, being certain to include an area large enough to insure an adequate number of pupils and a sufficient base for support.

County-wide district plan

Reorganize the rural school system on a county-wide district basis, giving the county school board authority to discontinue small schools whenever it is advisable, and to determine the location of larger centralized schools within the county.
